

June 1, 2009

Dear Fellow Members,

It is with a great sense of hope and renewed enthusiasm that I write to you today. I have recently had time to contemplate many things that have occurred over the past few years within NPGA and nothing causes me more concern than our continued decline in membership. While we have not enjoyed huge booms in membership over the past twenty years, we have also never seen a decline such as we are experiencing now. As a membership, this should be our primary concern. Surely there must be a reason or reasons. Is it something we are doing or not doing? Is it a combination of both?

In contemplating this issue and recent events I firmly believe it is both. We have lost our focus of purposes, and in doing so, we have failed to pursue avenues of growth and alienated parts of our membership. Whether this was done through intent, ignorance or inaction is not worth debating. What we need to do is take this opportunity to examine our purposes and renew our commitment to each so that we do not forever and irreversibly lose the opportunity to do so by either asking or encouraging our members to find an alternative organization to meet their needs.

You see, I believe that each of us has within us the capability and the desire to carry out our purposes as stated in our Articles of Incorporation (aka Corporate Charter). To quote Robert's Rules of Order: "In an incorporated organization, the corporate charter supersedes all its other rules, none of which can legally contain anything in conflict with the charter itself." The purposes set forth below and the names of the original 15 directors are found in this historic document dated April 22, 1976.

"Article III- The purposes for which the corporation is organized are as follows:

- To encourage the breeding of characteristic, purebred pygmy goats.
- To facilitate communication, education, and cooperation among breeders, researchers, and fanciers of pygmy goats.
- To establish regional affiliate clubs.
- To gather and disseminate practical and theoretical knowledge of the pygmy goat.
- To promote and popularize the breed.
- To provide an organizational framework to facilitate these purposes.
- To do everything necessary, proper, advisable, and/or practical for the accomplishment of the purposes hereinabove set forth, and to do all other things permitted by the Act, by other law, or by these Articles of Incorporation.
- To carry out the purposes hereinabove set forth in any state territory, district, or possession of the United States, or in any foreign country, to the extent that these purposes are not forbidden by law of the state, territory, district, or possession of the United States, or by foreign country.
- The corporation, subject to specific written limitations or restrictions imposed by the Act or by these Articles of Incorporation, and solely in furtherance of, but not in addition to, the limited purposes set forth in (H) of this Article, shall have and exercise all the powers specified in the Act.

(The Act is the Washington Nonprofit Corporation Act (RCW 24.03).)

Article IV (Lists powers as set forth in Act above as well as Prohibited Activities regarding the distribution of NPGA funds.)

Article V- Membership

Membership in the corporation shall be open to any member of the public who agrees to promote the purposes of this corporation as set forth in Article III, and shall be by election of the Board of Directors. A financial contribution to the corporation may be a requirement of membership as determined by the Board of Directors. The corporation shall not have a capital stock nor issue shares.

Article VI- Board of Directors: Management of the corporation shall be vested in a Board of Fifteen Directors; the qualifications, terms of office, manner of election, time and place of meetings, and powers and duties of directors shall be such as are prescribed by the Bylaws of the corporation. (Then is lists the names and addresses of the initial 15 directors)

The number of directors of the corporation shall be increased or decreased from time to time by amendment of the bylaws of the corporation, but no decrease shall have the effect of shortening the term of any incumbent director.”

We have lost our focus. I say this because I have heard statements and seen decisions we have all made which bear out this truth. Let’s look at the duties of directors, namely to carry on the business of the Association and take action on matters brought to their attention by the membership or chairpersons of committees and take any other action consistent with the Articles of Incorporation. (see Bylaws 4.8)

In their job description, directors are told, among other duties to:

- Determine and present those views, opinions and policies which reflect the objectives and philosophies of your **entire** region.
- Represent NPGA as a whole, and vote in accordance with its best interests.
- At all times maintain an objective stance on all problems, conditions, situations and controversies, whether within your region or while representing your region.

In many of the discussions and decisions over the past several years we have heard repeated a constant theme- “This is what the majority of the members in my region want.” While I can appreciate that we do have an election process for our directors whereby a majority is what is required to elect them, do directors not agree that they will, upon receiving this honor, represent the entire region? Does this not include all members of their region, for they all vote equally, and in the bigger picture, NPGA as a whole? It would seem to me this includes all members, equally considered, at all times. Be it the first time owner that purchased the animal as a backyard pet or the established breeder with a longtime commitment to NPGA through registration, breeding and showing of quality animals. Whether their focus is winning ribbons and show titles for their animals, or using their animals for meat and/or milk production, or for research purposes, they are entitled to the same representation. NPGA is to facilitate, that is provide an avenue for communication, education and cooperation among these folks as one of our ever established purposes. Have we truly invested in this activity? Or have we somehow traded this all inclusive concept for focusing only on what “the majority” wants or is currently doing? I see signs we have lost our focus by focusing on what individuals perceive to be the majority, and in doing so, have alienated a percentage of our membership that pays the same dues and is entitled to the same voice and support, and we are feeling the impact of that more each year.

The job description above regarding maintaining an objective stance at all times means that even when a director does not personally see the value of a particular issue brought to the board within their herd or of use to them personally, they will actively listen to those members in and out of their region report on those that do and perhaps try to learn why or how it is important to them. We should ask, are those members deserving of service within the framework of NPGA and its stated purposes? Why or why not? Are they expendable to NPGA? If we are fiscally unable to meet their needs do we have an alternative to offer? Do they make valid points for their requests that, while we may not share their particular interest, would be worthy of further research, consideration or other support? If the board votes to support programs or issues which a majority of our region does not understand or wish to partake in, did they educate themselves enough to communicate sufficient determining facts to the majority to help them understand why the board made this decision? And did they communicate that decision from an objective stance? This may include saying something like, "I know that many of you communicated to me that you were not in favor of this issue, but there are those members of NPGA for which this issue is of great importance. NPGA is not asking you to partake in their interest, but their needs fall within our stated purposes and so are important to the overall stability and versatility of the organization. Some of the reasons cited were _____, _____, and _____. The board debated the issue, your concerns were communicated as well as theirs, and this was the result of the board vote. In the NPGA, we try to address the needs of all factions of our membership, some that we (in our region) participate in and some that we do not. We recognize that all of our membership deserves representation and I hope that through recognizing the versatility of the pygmy goat in our membership, each of us is able to learn and grow."

Opportunity for growth should be another area of focus. Part of this is totally dependent on keeping our current members, not sending them off in search of a "better fit." This is not only one of our stated purposes; it is an essential component to any successful business. I do not think any of you would disagree that directors and even members, have a responsibility to grow the business of NPGA. As I was preparing this letter, I had the news on and they were interviewing a man who owns a successful independent gas station in Dallas, Texas. What they really wanted to know was how he managed to keep his prices low in the face of larger oil companies and the rising price of gas. He explained to them about the large holding tanks, the constant watch on the marketplace and then he said "and I sell great tacos!" Diversify! Now I am not suggesting that we sell tacos, but I am suggesting that we not cut off our nose to spite our face by ignoring those who have found a niche in NPGA that we may not see as particularly large. Again, those that want to focus on production or research, not only the breeder/show enthusiast. Are we inviting or are we judgmental and disdainful depending on the degree to which they vary from the emphasis we have placed on the use of the pygmy goat within our own herd? Do we spend our time and effort trying to "convert" them, or do we let them know we value the versatility of the pygmy goat and we are glad they have chosen NPGA as the organization to support their efforts. And do we offer them that support through welcoming MEMO articles, photos and personal stories and educational programs? Do we encourage clubs or forums on our website to try to unite others in our organization who may also share their interests?

Alienation of any faction of our membership is something NPGA cannot afford to do on many levels, and something our directors should be working hard to avoid. Recent communications have revealed that AGS has, in fact, opened its herd book to pygmy goats, making this a readily available option. While dual membership serves to promote the pygmy goat in general to both entities, if we give our members the impression, let alone out and out state, that they would be better served in another organization, we should not feign surprise when they take us at our word and actions, and choose one over another.

As I said, I am excited about the opportunity to allow the membership to consider this information, because I believe that we all can see the value in adhering to our basic principles and purposes and as we look at those, I think we will be able to see where we have deviated from the course set by the founding principles and navigate a more positive route. I believe that in that understanding and positive communication, we will see the value in embracing each of the purposes set forth in our Articles of Incorporation and that they are not mutually exclusive, but rather are the building blocks of a well-rounded and healthy organization that we can all be proud to support with the individual strengths and emphasis we each bring to the NPGA.

Respectfully yours,

Donna Elkins
NPGA Member, Region 3